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# NASIS

## NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

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NASIS-84, #2

# NEBRASKANS VIEW THEIR UNIVERSITY

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Price: $ .75

# The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

David R. Johnson - 1984 Study Director

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the eighth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The sample for the 1984 NASIS consists of 935 respondents eighteen years of age or older residing in households in Nebraska. The sample is selected through a process called random digit dialing: within each three-digit prefix in the state, four-digit numbers are selected randomly from all possible four-digit numbers to complete the telephone number. Respondents are further chosen randomly from the adults in the household and interviewed over the telephone by experienced, professional interviewers from the offices of the Bureau of Sociological Research. All interviewing was done during March and April of 1984. This procedure produces a high-quality, representative sample of Nebraska adults. Analysis shows the sample to be representative of the state on age, sex, race, and geographical distribution.

The interview averaged approximately 35 minutes and included questions about energy use, recreation, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life, and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value for the population lies within a range equal to the reported survey percentage plus or minus 3.3 percent. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of State and local government agencies for policy and program planning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research. No information identifying any respondent is released to any user and the strict confidentiality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organization and structure of the survey and for reports produced under its name rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and University departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organizations interested in membership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Director.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, the Bureau of Sociological Research and State and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure changes in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical issues. Plans for future years include continuing to reinterview the 1977 panel every two years to assess changes in their lives. Additional detail on the NASIS surveys can be obtained by contacting the NASIS Study Director at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1985 NASIS Prospectus.

# NEBRASKANS VIEW THEIR UNIVERSITY

How committed are the citizens of Nebraska to having a strong University? What importance do they assign to the University's missions of undergraduate education, training professionals, conducting research and providing service? And, how well do Nebraskans feel the University is fulfilling its missions? With these questions in mind, a cross section of the citizens of the State were asked about the University as part of the 1984 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research.

## NEBRASKAN'S DESIRE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

A representative sample of 457 adults was interviewed. They were asked: "Now we have some questions about the University of Nebraska. Do you think the University should strive to be one of the top public supported Universities in the Midwest region academically?" Ninety-three percent said "yes". Such strong support would indicate that Nebraskans are interested in supporting excellence at the University of Nebraska. But, what importance do they attach to the various missions of the institution and how do the citizens evaluate the job the University is now doing?

To obtain information on these issues, respondents were told: "Major state universities, like the University of Nebraska, serve several different purposes. One of the purposes of the University of Nebraska is to provide thousands of students with a basic college education. Would you say this purpose of the University

should be very important, somewhat important, or not too important?" Respondents were then asked: "How well do you think the University is doing in providing the students with a college education? Would you say an excellent job, a good job, or not such a good job?" These questions were repeated for the other missions: "training professionals such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, and research scientists"; "sponsoring and conducting research and other creative work"; and "directing services to the citizens of the State through such things as consultation, educational television, extension work, and medical services". A summary of responses to these questions is shown in Table 1.

## IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITY MISSIONS

While a majority of Nebraska's citizens think all four missions are important, a substantially greater number of people think providing a college education and training professionals is "very important" compared to those who believe conducting research and servicing citizens are in the top category of importance. Whether these opinions rest on an incomplete understanding of the role of research and service in a University or on beliefs that a lower priority should be given to these tasks can only be answered by further research.

## EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE

When asked to evaluate the job the University was doing in fulfilling each of its missions, only a minority felt the University was doing an "excellent job" in any of its missions. A

majority (more than 50 percent) did, however, rate the University as doing a "good job" for each mission. Fewer people gave research an "excellent" rating than to the other missions. It is noteworthy that a substantial number of people "Don't Know" how well the University is doing in fulfilling its missions. In the case of research, fully a quarter of the population (26 percent) were unable to make an evaluation. This would indicate that the University could do a better job informing its constituents about the work it is doing in fulfilling its missions.

## WHO THINKS WHAT?

It is of interest to investigate whether mission priority or performance evaluation varied by region of the state, community size, education of the respondents and contact people have had with the University. Our analysis shows that importance of the missions and performance ratings did not vary by region of the State. People in the west and north had views that were similar to those that reside in the south and east. Nor did community size have any appreciable effect on the responses. People in small towns had views comparable to those living in larger communities. Even those with college experience did not differ in any appreciable way from those who did not have such experience.

As expected, people who had some direct contact with the University had views that differed from those who did not. We asked: "We'd like to know about your own contact with the University of Nebraska. As I mention different ways people make use of the University, tell me whether you had such contact: Taken classes at the University; Obtained a degree at the

University; Had children who went to the University; Used one of the extension services; or Received help for business, personal or medical problems". Fifty-one percent of the sample had some form of direct contact with the University. Information in Table 2 indicates that any type of contact with the University seems to result in people giving a higher priority to research, but has no effect on the importance assigned to the service mission. Taking classes or obtaining a degree seemed to elevate the importance of the college education and professional training missions, but other types of contact had no effect on the priority assigned to these two missions. Why direct contact (even with service components) does not alter people's view of the importance of the service needs further study.

Direct contact with the University does increase the people's rating of how well the University performs its various missions. Those that receive help for their problems seem to be impressed the most. It would appear that the University is fairly effective in informing those who have direct contact with the institution, but needs to enhance efforts among those who do not have direct contact.

We also wanted to see whether those who believed a mission was of central importance gave it higher or lower performance ratings. Those who thought the various missions are very important gave higher performance ratings which were fairly uniform. Thirty-four percent gave "college education" an excellent rating. The proportions giving an excellent rating to professional training, research and service are 36 percent, 35 percent, and 39 percent, respectively. Even though thinking the

mission is very important raises performance ratings, still only a minority assign the top rating.

## SUMMARY

The vast majority of people want the University to be the top state supported school in the Midwest Region. It would appear the University has the support to excell. When asked about the importance of the University of Nebraska's missions, citizens attach more importance to providing a college education and professional training than to research and service. While a majority think the University is doing a good job, only a quarter of the population think the institution is doing excellent work in fulfilling its missions. People with direct contact with the University give excellent ratings more often, but they still constitute a minority. It appears that the University could expand its efforts to inform people of the work that it is doing.

TABLE 1.

IMPORTANCE OF MISSION AND EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE

| | Mission | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Provide College Education | Train Profes-sionals | Conduct Research | Service Citizens |
| Importance of Mission: | | | | |
| Very important | 83% | 82% | 57% | 64% |
| Somewhat important | 13 | 15 | 32 | 30 |
| Not too important | 1 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| Don't Know or Undecided | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Performance of Mission: | | | | |
| Excellent job | 26% | 27% | 18% | 25% |
| Good job | 55 | 54 | 52 | 54 |
| Not such a good job | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Don't Know or Undecided | 14 | 16 | 26 | 16 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

N = 457

TABLE 2.

CONTACT WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, MISSION PRIORITY AND EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE

Percent Judging Mission To Be Very Important

| | Provide College Education | Train Profes-sionals | Conduct Research | Service Citizens | Percent of Sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contact with University: | | | | | |
| Taken classes or obtained degree | 90% | 88% | 72% | 67% | 20% |
| Had children who attended University | 84 | 87 | 63 | 64 | 19 |
| Used Extension Service | 86 | 80 | 69 | 69 | 24 |
| Received help for problem | 87 | 85 | 79 | 68 | 16 |
| No contact | 82 | 91 | 54 | 63 | 49 |

Percent Rating Mission Performance as Excellent

| | Provide College Education | Train Profes-sionals | Conduct Research | Service Citizens |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contact with University: | | | | |
| Taken classes or obtained degree | 35% | 40% | 25% | 30% |
| Had children who attended University | 39 | 42 | 29 | 29 |
| Used Extension Service | 37 | 39 | 30 | 35 |
| Received help for problem | 38 | 47 | 38 | 39 |
| No contact | 23 | 23 | 17 | 27 |

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1984 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

| Report Number | Title |
|---|---|
| 1 | Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1984 NASIS. David R. Johnson. Price: $7.50. |